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Welcome to the Professional Interest Areas Special Edition

Looking Through Architecture's Glass Ceiling

by Kathryn H. Anthony, PhD

What factors affect one's ability to advance in the architectural profession? A recent study sought to address this controversial topic. An 11-page survey with almost 400 items was sent out to 800 randomly selected AIA members nationwide: 200 white males, 200 white females, 200 men of color, and 200 women of color. The random survey was part of a larger research effort to examine the "glass ceiling": obstacles that prevent certain individuals from obtaining high levels of responsibility, prestige, and power in their architectural careers. Results from the random sample are now in, and they are shocking.

Of the 800 surveys, 783 were successfully delivered and 257 were returned, a response rate of 33 percent. Although one cannot generalize from these results about the status of all architects, our results do describe situations specific to our sample. Among the key findings:

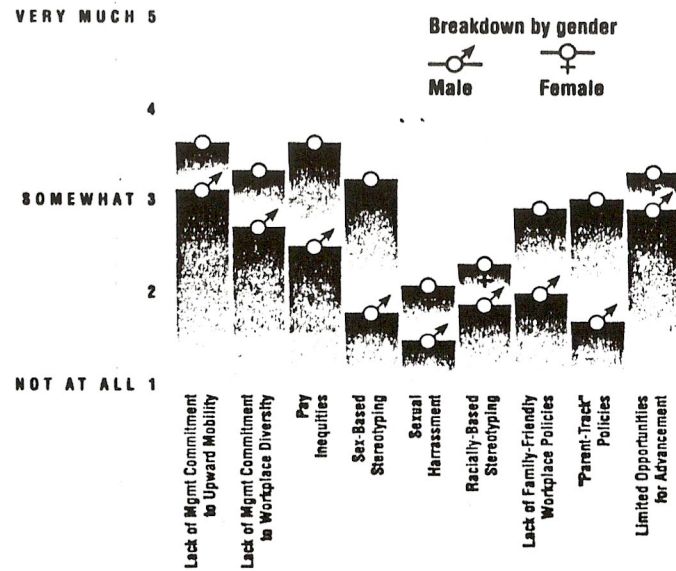
- Over half had seen or heard about gender discrimination in an architectural office
- Over a third had personally experienced it
- Almost a quarter had quit their architectural jobs because of unfair treatment
- Most women architects had seen a glass ceiling in their work environment; most men had not.
- Compared to men architects, women architects were more likely to have personally experienced, seen, or heard about gender discrimination in an architecture office or quit a job in architecture because of unfair treatment.

Significant gender and racial differences exist in how architects perceive glass ceiling barriers in the profession. Women and persons of color were much more likely to perceive particular glass ceiling barriers than were their male or white counterparts. Compared to male architects, female architects found the following barriers to be more problematic:

- Pay inequities for work of equal or comparable value
 - Lack of family-friendly workplace policies
 - Limited opportunities for advancement to decision-making positions
 - Lack of management commitment to establish policies toward upward mobility and workplace diversity
 - Sex-based stereotyping
 - Sexual harassment
 - Racially based stereotyping.
- Persons of color found these barriers to be more problematic than did their white counterparts:
- Lack of management commitment to establish policies toward upward mobility and workplace diversity
 - Racially and ethnically based stereotyping
 - Racial harassment
 - Racial abuse.

On a positive note, many of those sampled, including women and persons of color, believed that they had successfully overcome obstacles and broken through the glass ceiling in their

To what extent do the following obstacles create glass ceiling barriers for you?



architectural careers. Those women and persons of color who had most effectively done so appeared to have taken untraditional career paths, such as working as architects for large

corporations or the government.

Kathryn Anthony is chair of the Building Research Council at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture.

AIA Architect 2 (mid-Oct. 1995), p. 20.